United Nations A/58/74–E/2003/58

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 April 2003

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session
Item 93 (b) of the preliminary list*
Macroeconomic policy questions: science and technology for development

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2003
Geneva, 30 June-25 July 2003
Item 13 (b) of the provisional agenda**
Economic and environmental questions: science and technology for development

Preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has the honour to transmit to the members of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly the report of the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union on the ongoing preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society, which was prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 56/183 and 57/238.

* A/58/50/Rev.1 and Corr.1.
** E/2003/100.

03-34275 (E) 300503

Report of the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union on the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society

Summary

Pursuant to decisions of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Council and in accordance with the endorsement of the General Assembly on 21 December 2001 (see resolution 56/183), ITU has launched the preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society. In resolution 56/183, the Assembly recommended an intergovernmental preparatory process with active participation and direct contributions by other stakeholders. The General Assembly reaffirmed its support for the Summit in its resolution 57/238, adopted on 20 December 2002.

Three meetings of the Preparatory Committee are expected to set the framework for the first phase of the Summit, which will take place from 10 to 12 December 2003 in Geneva. The second phase will be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005. Two of these meetings of the Preparatory Committee were held in Geneva from 1 to 5 July 2002 and from 17 to 28 February 2003.

At its first meeting the Preparatory Committee elected Mr. Adam Samassekou of Mali as its President, along with 14 Vice-Presidents and one Vice-President each from Switzerland and Tunisia ex officio, who comprise the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee. The Preparatory Committee also established two subcommittees to conduct its work and adopted rules of procedure for its meetings and arrangements for accreditation.

At its second meeting, the Preparatory Committee agreed on two basic working documents which would serve as the basis for further discussions on the draft declaration of principles and draft action plan to be adopted at the Geneva phase of the Summit.

The third meeting of the Preparatory Committee will be held from 15 to 26 September 2003 in Geneva and will be preceded by an intersessional meeting from 15 to 18 July 2003 in Paris.

Five regional preparatory conferences have also been held in the context of the first phase of the Summit, namely in Bamako (25-30 May 2002), Bucharest (7-9 November 2002, preceded by a regional conference in Bishkek), Tokyo (13-15 January 2003), Bavaro, Dominican Republic (29-31 January 2003) and Beirut (4-6 February 2003).

Resolution 56/183 provides that ITU will take the lead role in Summit preparations, in coordination with United Nations agencies and other partners. The action plan endorsed at the fall 2000 session of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (now the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination) called for the creation of the High-level Summit Organizing Committee. This was established in March 2001 with the main task of overseeing and coordinating Summit planning and preparations by United Nations organizations. The Organizing Committee held two high-level meetings, on 18 October 2001 in New York and 24 April 2003 in Paris, back to back with meetings of CEB, and four working-level meetings in Geneva on 13 March, 25 June, 5 July and 4 December 2002.

The Executive Secretariat of the Summit, composed of staff detached from Governments, United Nations agencies, the private sector and civil society, began work in Geneva in September 2001 to support the preparatory process of the Summit.

ITU and the Executive Secretariat of the Summit have developed a fund-raising campaign for the preparation of the Summit, the estimated cost of which is approximately 5.9 million Swiss francs for each of the two phases.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 73 (Minneapolis, 1998), the Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) resolved to instruct the Secretary-General of ITU to place the question of the holding of a World Summit on the Information Society on the agenda of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) (now the System Chief Executive Board for Coordination) and to report to the ITU Council on the results of that consultation. ACC expressed its support for the Summit in 1999 and in 2000, it adopted an action plan for the organization of the Summit under the high patronage of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with ITU taking the lead role in its preparation. It was noted that a number of other organizations and agencies had expressed interest in being associated with the preparation and holding of the Summit. At its 2000 session the ITU Council, in its resolution 1158, instructed the Secretary-General of ITU to continue to consult with interested parties on holding the Summit in the year 2003 and to select a venue and begin making other preparations.

2. At its 2001 session the ITU Council, in resolution 1179, endorsed the framework for a Summit in two phases. The first phase will take place from 10 to 12 December 2003 in Geneva and the second phase will be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005.

3. In the summer of 2001 and 2002, the Economic and Social Council welcomed the proposed holding and framework of the Summit.

II. General Assembly resolutions 56/183 and 57/238

4. On 21 December 2001, the General Assembly adopted resolution 56/183, welcoming the proposal to hold the World Summit on the Information Society. In that resolution, the Assembly recommended an intergovernmental preparatory process in which other stakeholders would actively participate and make contributions. It endorsed the framework for the Summit approved by the ITU Council and the leading role of the International Telecommunication Union in the Summit and its preparation, in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners.

5. The resolution called on Governments to participate actively in Summit preparations and to be represented at the highest possible level. It also asked for active participation in and effective contributions to the Summit and its preparations by all relevant United Nations and intergovernmental organizations, including international and regional institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.

6. The resolution invited the Secretary-General of ITU to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh and fifty-eighth sessions, through the Economic and Social Council, for information, a report on the preparations for the Summit. Accordingly, the Secretary-General of ITU submitted a report on 24 July 2002, through the Council.

7. The General Assembly reaffirmed its support for the Summit in resolution 57/238, adopted on 20 December 2002, in which it further invited the Secretary-General of ITU to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth and fifty-ninth

sessions, through the Economic and Social Council, for information a report on the preparations for the Summit. On 22 November 2002, the General Assembly adopted resolution 57/53 relating to developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security.

III. The preparatory process

A. The Preparatory Committee

8. The first meeting of the Preparatory Committee was held in Geneva from 1 to 5 July 2002 and the second meeting from 15 to 28 February 2003, also in Geneva. Invitations to attend the first and second meetings of the Preparatory Committee were sent by the Secretary-General of ITU to Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Administrations States Members of the United Nations and of the International Telecommunication Union on 7 February and 14 October 2002. Invitations were also sent to all International Telecommunication Union Sector Members.

9. The report of the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee and the documentation for that meeting can be found at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents. At the first meeting, Mr. Adama Samassekou (Mali) was elected President of the Preparatory Committee, along with 14 Vice-Presidents and one Vice-President each from Switzerland and Tunisia, ex-officio, who comprise the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee. The members of the Bureau are: the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali and South Africa for the African Group; Brunei Darussalam, Japan and Pakistan for the Asian Group; Latvia, Romania and the Russian Federation for the Eastern European Group; Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Mexico for the Latin American and Caribbean Group; Finland, France and the United States of America for the Western Group. The first meeting of the Preparatory Committee was attended by 607 representatives of 142 Member States, 34 participants from business sector entities, 223 participants from non-governmental organizations and civil society, and 110 participants from United Nations bodies and international organizations.

10. At the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee two subcommittees were established to conduct its work: Subcommittee 1 on Rules of Procedure and Subcommittee 2 on Themes and Outcomes. Rules of procedure of the Preparatory Committee, arrangements for participation in the Preparatory Committee, and arrangements for accreditation for both the Preparatory Committee and the Summit were adopted.

11. An informal meeting of Subcommittee 2 took place from 16 to 18 September 2002 in Geneva to advance work on the themes and content of the Summit. The report of the meeting can be found at: http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents.

12. The second meeting of the Preparatory Committee was held in Geneva from 17 to 28 February 2003. The meeting was attended by 1,586 participants, including 918 delegates from 146 States, 60 participants from business sector entities, 398 participants from NGOs and civil society, 128 participants from the United Nations and its specialized agencies and 59 participants from other intergovernmental organizations.

13. The Heads of State of Romania and Senegal spoke at a Visionary Panel on the first day of the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee. At the second meeting also, the Preparatory Committee agreed on working documents to serve as the basis for further discussions on the draft declaration and draft action plan. It established an intersessional mechanism to advance negotiations on the draft texts, including a meeting to be held in Paris from 15 to 18 July 2003. The dates and venue for the third meeting of the Preparatory Committee were decided as 15 to 26 September 2003 in Geneva.

14. The report of the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee and the documentation for the meeting can be found at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents. More than 100 written contributions were received. The meeting agreed on two working documents, which will serve as the basis for further discussions on the draft declaration and draft action plan. At its second meeting, the Preparatory Committee also agreed that inputs from observers would be reflected in a separate section of the revised documents with a distinct title, on the understanding that proposals by Governments would constitute the basis of negotiations. These two working documents have been revised and can be found on the web site since 21 March 2003 at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents. At this stage in the process, and based on the latest draft of the working documents, the main issues are set out below.

15. The draft declaration of principles (WSIS/PCIP/DT/1-E) outlines the global challenges involved in building the information society and sets out a common vision of the information society which is people-centred, inclusive, geared to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and responsive to the additional development challenges posed by the digital divide. The draft identifies the essential requirements and 10 key principles for the development of an equitable information society, based on the need to ensure:

(i) Universal, ubiquitous and affordable access to information and communication technologies;

(ii) The right to communicate and to access information;

(iii) Multi-stakeholder involvement in the development of information and communications;

(iv) Human and institutional capacity-building;

(v) Confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies;

(vi) The creation of an enabling environment;

(vii) That information and communication technology applications create benefits in all aspects of daily life;

(viii) Respect for and enjoyment of cultural diversity and multilingualism;

(ix) The upholding of ethical dimensions;

(x) International and regional cooperation with a view to fostering policy dialogue on global trends in the information society.

16. The draft action plan (WSIS/PCIP/DT/2-E) recognizes that the information society is an evolving concept and that it has reached different levels of development across the regions and countries of the world. The draft notes that,

from this perspective, it would be more effective to design a flexible action plan established in accordance with the Millennium Declaration Goals and that can be used as a reference framework and a source of guidance and inspiration at regional and national levels.

17. The draft action plan presents a list of issues based on the key principles identified in the draft Declaration of Principles, and around which action proposals are formulated. It focuses on the initial objectives to be achieved under the plan of action, strategies programmes and methods for implementation, international cooperation and financing and proposed follow-up activities.

18. At its second session the Preparatory Committee also established an intersessional mechanism, based on the membership of the Bureau, to refine further the documents for the meeting of an open-ended intergovernmental drafting group, to be convened from 15 to 18 July 2003, at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris. Detailed information on the intersessional mechanism can be found at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents.

19. The dates for the third meeting of the Preparatory Committee were decided as 15 to 26 September 2003. It will be held at the International Conference Centre in Geneva.

B. Regional preparatory conferences

20. A series of regional preparatory conferences have been held in the context of the Summit, in each of the United Nations regions. The Bamako regional conference was held from 25 to 30 May 2002, ahead of the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee. Other regional conferences took place in Bucharest (7-9 November 2002, preceded by a subregional conference in Bishkek); Tokyo (13-15 January 2003); Baváro, Dominican Republic (29-31 January 2003); and Beirut (4-6 February 2003) in advance of the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee. These conferences focused on subjects of concern to each region. They assessed the key challenges, opportunities and constraints stemming from the information society, developed a common vision and understanding for the region and provided input as to how key issues could be addressed and solutions found to the problems identified.

C. Other initiatives

21. Other major initiatives include a League of Arab States meeting in Cairo from 16 to 18 June 2003; the Mauritius Ministerial Conference on Access to Information and Communication Technologies for All from 3 to 5 April 2003, in Pointe aux Piments, Mauritius and a meeting of Francophone ministers from 3 to 5 September 2003 in Rabat.

D. The structure and functioning of the first phase of the Summit

22. The Summit will take place under the high patronage of Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations. Official letters of invitation to Heads of State and Governments to participate in the first phase of the Summit were sent out from New York on 22 April 2003.

23. The first phase of the Summit will consist of a core political event and high-level round tables, as well as side and parallel events. The core Summit event, which will be held from 10 to 12 December 2003, at Palexpo in Geneva, is intended to attract Heads of State, as well as the most senior-level representatives of international organizations, business entities and civil society. This three-day meeting will provide the opportunity for States and observers to make brief, general statements on the information society. It would also include, as part of the core Summit event, a number of high-level round table discussions on key themes of the information society.

24. A number of side events will be organized on themes that are directly related to the Summit. Parallel events, unrelated to the core Summit, would be held prior to and during the core Summit.

IV. Organization of the Summit

A. The High-level Summit Organizing Committee

25. The Action Plan adopted by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) (now the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)) called for the creation of a high-level Summit organizing committee, consisting of those United Nations agencies interested in participating in the preparation of the Summit. The Organizing Committee was established in March 2001 under the chair of the Secretary-General of ITU, Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, and is supported by an executive secretariat. The main task of the Organizing Committee is to generally oversee and coordinate Summit planning and preparations for the United Nations system. (A list of present members of the Organizing Committee and its terms of reference are available at http://www.itu.int/wsis/hlsoc).

26. Two high-level meetings of the Organizing Committee have taken place: on 18 October 2001 in New York and on 24 April 2003 in Paris, both of them in conjunction with CEB meetings. Four working-level meetings of the Committee were also held in 2002. In addition, the Secretary-General of ITU has regularly informed CEB on the Summit preparations.

27. Members of the High-level Organizing Committee are active in the Summit process. A compilation of their written contributions on themes to PrepCom-1 is contained in document PC-1/CONTR/1-E. Furthermore, nine members (UNESCO, WIPO, UNITAR, UNDP, WHO, UNCTAD, the World Bank, ILO, ITU) participated in the multi-stakeholder thematic round tables organized during the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee. (A compilation of the reports on the outcome of the multi-stakeholder round tables can be found in document WSIS/PC-2/DOC/11 at http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/).

B. The United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force

28. The United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force has held four meetings to date, the last of which took place in Geneva during the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee. The Task Force meeting focused

inter alia on the contribution of the task force to the Summit process. The Task Force had the opportunity of reporting on the outcome of its meeting to the Preparatory Committee at its second meeting and to participate in one of the eight multi-stakeholder round tables organized during that meeting. The next meeting of the Task Force will take place in Geneva at the time of the third meeting of the Preparatory Committee and the proposed agenda includes the substantive contribution of the Task Force to the Summit.

C. The ITU Council Working Group

29. The overall managerial responsibility for the Summit is placed with ITU in accordance with decisions taken by the ITU Council and relevant General Assembly resolutions. At its 2002 session, the ITU Council, in resolution 1196, converted the World Summit on the Information Society Liaison Committee of the Council into the Council Working Group on the World Summit on the Information Society, open to all Member States and Sector Members. The Chairman of the World Summit on the Information Society Liaison Committee of the Council, Mr. Yuri G. Grin (Russian Federation) was appointed by Council at its 2002 session to chair the Working Group (see http://www.itu.int/council/indexgroups.html).

30. The Working Group has held three meetings to date. It produced a proposal for a framework and timetable for the ITU contribution to the Summit which was considered at the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference held in Marrakesh from 23 September to 18 October 2002. In conjunction with the Plenipotentiary Conference, the Government of Morocco organized a Forum on the Information Society.

31. In Decision 8 (Marrakesh, 2002) the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference decided to forward to the Working Group the framework contained in annex 1 to the decision, as a guideline for further elaboration of ITU substantive input to the Summit declaration of principles and action plan of the Summit.

32. The Working Group produced two contributions to the preparatory process at its meeting in Lisbon in December 2002. The first of these consisted of an edited version of annex 1 to Decision 8 (Marrakesh, 2002), which describes relevant ITU activities. The second contribution consisted of a proposed ITU supplementary input to the Summit declaration of principles and action plan, intended to highlight some areas in which specific actions will be required of ITU as part of the Summit process.

33. The Secretary-General of ITU addressed the plenary during the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee, and presented the three fundamental objectives set by the International Telecommunication Union membership in respect of the Summit. The substantive contribution of the ITU membership and the report on ITU activities were appended to the report of the Secretary-General of ITU submitted as an official document of the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee (see http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents).

D. The Executive Secretariat

34. The Executive Secretariat for the Summit was established by the ITU Secretary-General of ITU in the fall of 2001 at offices provided by ITU in Geneva.

The Executive Secretariat, which is headed by M. Pierre Gagné, comprises experts sent from Governments, United Nations agencies, the private sector and civil society. UNESCO, UNITAR and UNDP have detached experts to the Executive Secretariat.

35. ITU has provided four full-time staff and five additional high-level staff giving around 50 per cent of their time to Summit-related activities, all of whom work closely with the Executive Secretariat. In addition, ITU provided the premises, office equipment and the information and communication technologies necessary for the functioning of this Secretariat. Furthermore, as far as practicable, ITU frequently provides services free of charge for Summit preparations, in particular the services provided by the Office of the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General, the Legal Affairs Unit, the Coordination, External Relations and Communications Units, the Conference and Common Services Departments and the Information Services Department.

E. Finances and fund-raising

36. The estimated cost of each of the two preparatory phases of the Summit is approximately 6 million Swiss francs. The host countries are responsible for the cost of the Summit itself and related events. With respect to the preparatory process and to obtain the necessary funding, ITU and the Executive Secretariat for the Summit have developed a fund-raising campaign for the Summit. Letters requesting support have been sent by the Secretary-General of ITU to Member States, the private sector and other entities.

37. In its resolution 56/183 the General Assembly invited the international community to make voluntary contributions to a special trust fund established by ITU to support the Summit, as well as to facilitate the effective participation of representatives of developing countries, in particular those from the least developed countries.

38. To date, contributions from United Nations agencies other than ITU have been mostly in the form of human resources. Cash contributions received as of 15 February 2003 fall into two categories: tied funds (Swf 2,854,282) and untied funds (Swf 1,867,298).

F. Conclusion

39. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 56/183 and 57/238, much progress has been made, both in organizational and substantive terms, in preparing for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. The multi-stakeholder approach that has guided the Summit process and the active role of the United Nations agencies therein can continue to help galvanize the universal commitment required to pursue a range of policies and actions that would allow the international community to take advantage, in an equitable manner, of the opportunities created by the information and communication technologies revolution. The Summit should serve as a strategic occasion for world leaders to agree on how information and communication technologies can best be harnessed to accelerate the attainment of development objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, and to make concrete commitments towards that end.